

Christians in Fellowship at Different Tables?

The Eucharist – A Crucial Issue in the Ecumenical Discourse¹

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Abstract:

This article gives an overview on the lines of separation between the major Christian traditions and how these are linked with the question of Eucharistic fellowship. It further explains the multilateral ecumenical discussion on the issue of the Eucharist as they have been going on in the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches. The author shows, that it is the task of the churches to put the proposals of Faith and Order into practice or to do further work and come up with other solutions.

Introduction

The very existence of something called ‘the ecumenical movement’ reminds us of the history of Christianity, which can be seen – from a certain perspective – as a history of separations and schisms. Already in the early centuries Christians had different views on how to understand Jesus Christ as son of God. And already in the early centuries churches condemned others who had a different understanding.

One of the earliest separations – not the first one though - happened as a consequence of the Council of Chalcedon in the year 451. The next big schism, as we all know, is the separation between the church in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire and the church in the Western part of the Roman Empire. And then we know of another important split within the Western church, which happened in the 16th century: the reformation.

In each of these incidents the communion between churches was broken, a fact which became visible mainly in two points: namely, that the others on each side are not any longer remembered in the intercessional prayer and also that a common Eucharist was not any longer possible. Each side organized its own church structure, organized its own worship services, its own hierarchy etc.

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In the early years and in the Middle Ages this was probably not felt very much in a negative way by the average lay person or faithful in a parish, because in those days, the societies were more closed than they are today. In a given region there was only one church present, so that the faithful in many cases did not even know about the existence of other churches and even less about their different theologies. This situation changed in the 19th and 20th centuries. Because of the technical progress people since then have a much greater mobility and the population gets mixed. Something that practically did not happen before was, that Christians from different traditions and churches started to marry each other, lived and worked together, went to school together. In this new situation it was felt directly by the faithful, that they are separated in different churches. And this separation is felt in the most direct and most painful way in worship and its main expression of communion in the Eucharist, for which people who during the week share everything go to different churches, sometimes in the same street.

Therefore the Eucharist and the question of Eucharistic communion has a central place in the ecumenical movement of today. The Eucharist is THE place in Christian spirituality and in Christian theology where communion and unity and at the same time separation and schism become most visible and affect the faithful.

I will therefore in the following presentation look into the way, in which the question of the Eucharist has been and is being discussed within the ecumenical movement. This is to say: in the discussions between churches as they started at the beginning of the 20th century. First I will develop in a more detailed way the close connection between the search for unity and the question about the Eucharist. In a second step I will present to you the different understandings of the Eucharist from a historical perspective, in order to show, where the main lines of separation are located. And then I will explain how the Commission of Faith & Order of the World Council of Churches has addressed and discussed the issue and tried to make proposals for bringing the churches closer together on this issue. In my last part I will give you some perspective on the future of this question.

1. The central place of the Eucharist in the search for unity

The modern ecumenical movement started in the beginning of the 20th century in different parts of the world, in different churches and with different approaches. There were on the one hand the missionary agencies of different protestant churches, which had started congregations and churches in Africa and Asia. They discovered, that they are not able to give a credible witness to the Gospel, if they find themselves in a

situation of competition about which of the churches is teaching the truth. But also in the Orthodox world, the Ecumenical Patriarch already in 1902 and again in 1920 launched the idea of unity or fellowship among the churches despite their doctrinal differences.² But one of the main questions, which – by the way – is still not answered until today, is: What is this unity, which we are looking for? How does it look like?

This question was taken up by the so called movement on Faith and Order, which later on became a part of the World Council of Churches and understands its purpose to work on, to study and to discuss the theological and doctrinal questions which separate the churches and possibly to overcome them.

What is important for our theme is the fact, that the Faith and Order movement, in a first World Conference on Faith and Order in 1927 in Lausanne/Switzerland tried to identify these theological questions which are church dividing. And in this conference it became very clear, that the main issues in this area are not only the question of what unity means at all, but also the questions of the sacraments, ministry, the understanding of the church and the interpretation of Scripture.

In the further work of the Faith and Order movement the question of unity was further discussed and the many existing different understandings of unity were grouped into three main models of unity. I quote from the Second World Conference on Faith and Order in 1937 in Edinburgh:

(a) Co-operative Action

The unity which we seek may be conceived as a confederation or alliance of Churches for co-operative action.

In all areas, where common purposes and tasks exist, such action is already widely possible without violation of conscience. Church “federations” are the most common expressions of such unity...

² Cf. Patriarchal and Synodical Encyclical of 1902 and Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 1920, „Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere“ in: Gennadios Limouris (ed.), Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism. Statements, Messages and Reports on the Ecumenical Movement 1902-1992, WCC Publications Geneva 1994, pp. 1-5 and 9-11.

We recognise that federations for co-operative action should not be construed as examples of “federal union”. Certain of our members wish to be recorded as believing that “federal union” is not merely the most we can achieve, but also the most that we should desire.

We are agreed that co-operative action between Churches unable to achieve intercommunion or to look toward corporate union, and compelled by fidelity to conscience to remain separate bodies with separate loyalties, is not our final goal, since co-operative action in itself fails to manifest to the world the true character of the Church as one community of faith and worship, as well as of service.

(b) Intercommunion

A second aspect of Church unity is commonly indicated by the term “intercommunion.” This is the fullest expression of a mutual recognition between two or more Churches. Such recognition is also manifested in the exchange of membership and ministrations. ..

We think that it should be pointed out that the word “intercommunion” has at present several different connotations. In the fullest sense it means a relation between two or more Churches in which the communion of each is open to all members of the other at all times. This is to be distinguished from relations in which the communion of one Church is “open” to members of other Churches without complete reciprocal recognition, and still more from the occasional welcoming of members of other Churches by a Church whose normal rule would exclude them...When this term “intercommunion” is used in discussion of Church unity, its meaning should be clearly defined...”

(c) Corporate Union

The third form in which the final goal of our movement may be expressed presents, from the standpoint of definition, the greatest difficulties. It is commonly indicated by such terms as “corporate union” or “organic unity”.

These terms are forbidding to many, as suggesting the ideal of a compact governmental union involving rigid uniformity. We do not so understand them, and

none of us desires such uniformity. On the contrary, what we desire is the unity of a living organism, with the diversity characteristic of the members as a healthy body.

The idea of “corporate union” must remain for the vast majority of Christians their ideal. In a Church so united the ultimate loyalty of every member would be given to the whole body and not to any part of it. Its members would move freely from one part to another and find every privilege of membership open to them. The sacraments would be the sacraments of the whole body. The ministry would be accepted by all as a ministry of the whole body...”³

These 3 different understandings of church unity are, of course, three schematic models, which exist among theologians from different traditions in various forms or sub-forms. In all these three models the question of the Eucharist is somehow involved. In the first model, which sees unity achieved – in short words - if the churches cooperate in practical questions, there is no Eucharistic communion involved. And this is, because for some churches it seems not possible, and for others it is even not necessary to be united at the Eucharistic table. This is different in the second and third model. In the second model unity is achieved, if the different churches, which remain different bodies and organisations, can invite members of the other churches to their Eucharistic table and their members can receive Eucharist in other churches. The basis on which this model functions is, that churches recognize each other fully as churches, although there are still differences existing in theological questions. The third model goes a step further and sees as the ideal for unity “the unity of a living organism”, which should not imply uniformity though. But it means that there is only one ministry and one Eucharist, not different ones to which others are received as in the second model.

A strong part of the Faith and Order movement from the beginning on favoured the third model, knowing that it is the most difficult one. But from the beginning on there were also members in Faith and Order, for whom either the first or the second model was the one to be achieved.

2. The historical development of the separation of Christians around the Eucharistic table

³ Lukas Vischer (ed.), A Documentary History of the Faith & Order Movement 1927-1963, St.Louis 1963, p.61-63.

The question is now, of course, - if churches agree, that we need to find unity “so that the world may believe”⁴-, why is it so difficult to heal the broken communion? Why can the churches not just declare, that they re-establish communion? – There are different reasons, why this is not so easy. We will look at this question taking as example the Eucharist, which is, as we have seen, the central place, where this communion would be expressed.

I reminded us in the beginning about the main schisms in Christian history which led to the development of different churches. If we look at the picture as we have it today, - and I will only look at the major church families – then we can depict the following situation in regard to the Eucharist: (*see Appendix*)

On this drawing⁵ you see the historical development of the different churches and you can see, where the schisms happened and where communion was broken.

The thick lines show the separations at the Eucharistic table. There is the one that happened in the 5th century between the churches which we call nowadays Oriental Orthodox Churches (Coptic Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Ethiopian Orthodox) and the rest of the Church in the Roman Empire. The Council of Chalcedon had tried to give an answer to the question in how far Jesus Christ was God or human or both. Because the formula found by this Council was not accepted by theologians and lay people in Egypt, who were strongly influenced by another theological school, there was a big fight during the following years which led to the fact, that the Copts elected their own Patriarch and broke the communion with the rest of the church in the Roman Empire. The same was the case in Syria. The case of the Armenian Church is different. This was already a different church with its own structures living outside the territory of the Roman Empire. It only later had the chance to know about the Chalcedonian formula and after a while did not agree with it.

⁴ Jn 17:21

⁵ This drawing gives a very rough overview on some of the main schisms within Christianity around the Eucharistic table. It indicates also, that f.ex. the separation between Lutherans and Reformed has been partly healed by the Leuenberg Concord, which has though not been signed by all Lutheran and Reformed Churches around the world. The scheme does not show the partial healing between some of the Lutherans and some Anglican churches (Porvoo and Waterloo agreements) for technical reasons

The next big separation is the one between the Eastern part and the Western part of the Church in the Roman Empire in 1054. This split has to do with different political and cultural developments in East and West. The concrete occasion of the events in 1054; where Rome and Constantinople excommunicated each other, were political questions and power questions, which brought then to the surface theological questions, which had already since a certain time been treated differently on both sides.⁶

And then we have another separation within the Western church in the 16th century, which is the Reformation, which occurred mainly for the reason of a theological discovery of Martin Luther as a reaction to a specific development within the Roman Church: this is the doctrine on justification by faith alone. As we all know, the consequences of the discussions on this theological issues led to the mutual condemnation of both sides.

I should mention here also the separation between the Church of England and Rome, which happened purely on power reasons. The Church of England did not any longer recognize the Pope as its head, but nothing was changed theologically – at least not at the time when the split happened.

There is then another separation line within the reformation churches, namely between the Lutherans and the Reformed (followers of Zwingli and Calvin). And between both of them and the churches of the so called radical reformation, like the Baptist churches and all those which baptize only adults we have another separation line.

We see in this picture, that during the history more and more churches and church families came into existence and although in most cases the ‘mother churches’ (if we want to call them in this way) declared the communion with the new community as broken, at the same time also the earlier break between the ‘mother church’ and others, continued. For example, when the Lutheran churches were excommunicated by Rome, the mutual excommunication which existed already between Rome and Constantinople, continued now also between Constantinople and the Lutheran churches without a specific declaration.

⁶ For example the question of the “filioque”, the addition to the third article of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which had occurred in the West already before the Council of Chalcedon (!), became a reason for separation only in the discussions around and after 1054; cf. Maria-Helene Gamillscheg, *Die Kontroverse um das Filioque. Möglichkeiten einer Problemlösung auf Grund der Forschungen und Gespräche der letzten hundert Jahre*, Das östliche Christentum - Neue Folge Band 45, Würzburg 1996, p. 11f..

But we need to consider more closely the question which issues are involved in the separation of all these churches at the Eucharistic table.

First of all we can say, that in the split between what are now called the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the others, the occasion was the Council of Chalcedon and its understanding of the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ. Because of different understandings of this Christological question the communion was broken and therefore a common Eucharist was no longer possible. The Eucharist here is the expression of a common faith and a common theological understanding. And if there are differences in the understanding of the theological topic of Christology, a common Eucharist is not any longer possible – at least according to the understanding of that time.

The schism of 1054 is a similar case: There was again – among more cultural differences and political interests - a difference in the faith, and more specifically in the understanding of the Holy Spirit. Again, the separation at the Eucharistic table was an expression of the broken communion on the ground of the differences in faith.

In the Reformation of the 16th century the communion was broken also because there were differences in faith, namely in the understanding of justification. And this had a direct impact on the understanding of the Eucharist itself: According to Martin Luther the Eucharist cannot be understood as a sacrifice in the sense, that the human being DOES something in order to receive God's grace. He emphasized, that the Eucharist is a gift of God and that the only sacrifice is the one of Jesus Christ on the cross, which is enough for once and ever.

The Eucharist became then also an important issue of different theological understanding between the Lutherans and the Reformed. Here the question was the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. While the Reformed understood the Eucharist mainly as a memorial meal, the Lutherans kept the understanding of the real presence of Christ “in, with and under” the elements of bread and wine.

We also need to see, that Lutherans and Reformed together developed a new type of church by abandoning the idea of episcopal succession. For the Lutherans it was more a solution borne out of an emergency situation, that they started to ordain their own priests without the involvement of a bishop. The reason was, that none of the Roman

bishops in Germany had gone over to the reformation.⁷ For the Reformed churches the whole concept of the church was different. The idea of a bishop and the line of succession of bishops back to the time of the apostles did not appear.

This means, that from now on there were churches existing, which had broken with a so far implicit traditional agreement about the idea and understanding of the priest as the person to lead the Eucharistic celebration and to represent Christ as the host of the Eucharistic table. The reformation churches emphasize much more the priesthood of all believers, although they still have an ordained ministry.

If we then look further into the historical development, we can see, that there are even more new churches coming into existence. In the Baptist churches the Eucharist does not play any longer the role it had in the traditional churches. And a very new development are the Pentecostal churches and new groups like the African Instituted churches, in all of which the separating point is not so much the Eucharist, but the understanding of Baptism.

This is a very brief overview, which gives you the main theological issues and differences which separate the churches at the one Eucharistic table as they developed during history. In summary I repeat these issues:

- questions of common faith like the nature of Jesus Christ and the nature of the Holy Spirit,
- the understanding of the Eucharist as sacrifice,
- the question of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist,
- the understanding of the ministry and its role for celebrating the Eucharist.

3. The work on the Eucharist by the Faith & Order Commission of the WCC

As the modern ecumenical movement and within it especially the movement and later on the Commission on Faith and Order took up the question of the Eucharist, exactly these issues appeared in the discussions. I would like now to show you, in how far the multilateral dialogue in the framework of the World Council of Churches has made a progress towards unity in this regard.

⁷ This was different in some of the Scandinavian countries, where the episcopal succession was kept.

In 1982 the WCC published a document which had been prepared by the Commission on Faith and Order on “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry”- also known as the “Lima document”, because it was adopted by the Commission at its meeting in Lima/Peru.

This document was the first one to be called a ‘convergence’ text, which means: it tried to find out about the convergences, the similarities and the points, where the churches are very close together. Or, in cases, where there are differences, it tries to show ways, how the churches can come closer together.

Concerning the Eucharist, this text points out a convergence among the churches in the first range concerning its institution through Jesus Christ himself, as it is reported in the New Testament (I Cor. 11:23–25; cf. Matt. 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–20).⁸ No church would understand the Eucharist as not instituted by Jesus Christ. The last Supper of Jesus is described as a liturgical meal and “consequently the eucharist is a sacramental meal... Its celebration continues as the central act of the Church’s worship“. There seems also – according to BEM to be convergence about the meaning of the Eucharist⁹ as “thanksgiving to the father”, as “anamnesis or memorial of Christ”, as “invocation of the Spirit”, “communion of the faithful” and as “meal of the kingdom”.

Within these issues the Lima document is also taking up the controversial questions which had developed in the past.

There is for example the question of the Eucharist as sacrifice. Interestingly the text formulates as a convergence: *“The eucharist is the great sacrifice (italics by DH) of praise by which the Church speaks on behalf of the whole creation. For the world which God has reconciled is present at every eucharist: in the bread and wine, in the persons of the faithful, and in the prayers they offer for themselves and for all people. Christ unites the faithful with himself and includes their prayers within his own intercession so that the faithful are transfigured and their prayers accepted. This sacrifice of praise is possible only through Christ, with him and in him. The bread and wine, fruits of the earth and of human labour, are presented to the Father in faith and thanksgiving. The eucharist thus signifies what the world is to become: an offering*

⁸ Cf. BEM on Eucharist par. 1

⁹ Cf. BEM on Eucharist parr. 2-26

and hymn of praise to the Creator, a universal communion in the body of Christ, a kingdom of justice, love and peace in the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰

It is then interesting to see, how the document deals with the fact, that the term ‘sacrifice’ is controversial among the churches. In COMMENTARY (8) the Lima document says: *“It is in the light of the significance of the eucharist as intercession that references to the eucharist in Catholic theology as “propitiatory sacrifice” may be understood. The understanding is that there is only one expiation, that of the unique sacrifice of the cross, made actual in the eucharist and presented before the Father in the intercession of Christ and of the Church for all humanity.*

In the light of the biblical conception of memorial, all churches might want to review the old controversies about “sacrifice” and deepen their understanding of the reasons why other traditions than their own have either used or rejected this term.”

This is just an example, how the BEM-document tries to overcome the old controversies: It points to the reasons why others have used or rejected – in this case – the specific term of ‘sacrifice’ and from this perspective the text invites the churches, to review their controversies.

Another classical point of disagreement between the churches is the question of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and whether this presence is connected or not to the signs of bread and wine. Here BEM formulates as a convergence: *“The Church confesses Christ’s real, living and active presence in the eucharist.”* And the next sentence explains this: *“While Christ’s real presence in the eucharist does not depend on the faith of the individual, all agree that to discern the body and blood of Christ, faith is required.”¹¹* The commentary which follows par. 13 does not hide though, that there are still differences between the churches concerning the connection between the eucharistic elements and the presence of Christ. But the document leaves it to the churches to decide *“whether this difference can be accommodated within the convergence formulated in the text itself.”¹²* And again there is an attempt to look into the different understandings of the presence of Christ in the history: *“In the history of the Church there have been various attempts to understand the mystery of the real and unique presence of Christ in the eucharist. Some are content merely to affirm this presence without seeking to explain it. Others consider it necessary to assert a change*

¹⁰ BEM on Eucharist par. 4

¹¹ BEM on Eucharist, par.13

¹² BEM on Eucharist, Commentary 13

wrought by the Holy Spirit and Christ's words, in consequence of which there is no longer just ordinary bread and wine but the body and blood of Christ. Others again have developed an explanation of the real presence which, though not claiming to exhaust the significance of the mystery, seeks to protect it from damaging interpretations."¹³

And between the lines we can hear – as it was said explicitly in the earlier paragraph -, the question to the churches whether these differences, which still exist, really need to be a reason for separation or whether one could not accept the others despite the differences.

The third part of the BEM-text on Eucharist is dealing with the celebration of the Eucharist and the liturgical elements used in the different churches. It proposes *"further study... concerning the question of which features of the Lord's Supper were unchangeably instituted by Jesus, and which features remain within the Church's competence to decide"*.¹⁴ This points to a rather recent question, which could be a reason for separation, namely the question in how far the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist can have different shapes according to cultural differences.

I will not develop this further. I only wanted to show, that the BEM document was able to point out convergences and commonalities between the churches and at the same time proposed solutions for the existing differences, especially concerning the understanding of the Eucharist as sacrifice and the question of the presence of Christ.

If we compare this with the issues, which I identified in the historical overview as the most important dividing questions, we see now, that BEM in the section on the Eucharist does not address directly the question of the differences in faith (like the Christological question or the understanding of the Holy Spirit). It also does not deal with the issue of ministry. This last question though was addressed in an own part of the document on 'Ministry'. And also here the document shows the convergences and the differences. In summary we can say, that the difference concerning the ministry is mainly – as I already pointed out in the historical overview, that some churches

¹³ BEM on Eucharist, commentary 15

¹⁴ BEM on Eucharist Commentary 28

understand the episcopal succession¹⁵ as an effective sign for the preservation of the apostolic succession of the church, while others – like many of the Reformation churches – don't see the apostolic succession of their church destroyed, if the visible sign of the laying on of hands of the bishop does not exist. BEM tries to reconcile the two attitudes by proposing that “ *a) Churches which have preserved the episcopal succession are asked to recognize both the apostolic content of the ordained ministry which exists in churches which have not maintained such succession and also the existence in these churches of a ministry of episkopé in various forms. b) Churches without the episcopal succession, and living in faithful continuity with the apostolic faith and mission, have a ministry of Word and sacrament, as is evident from the belief, practice, and life of those churches. These churches are asked to realize that the continuity with the Church of the apostles finds profound expression in the successive laying on of hands by bishops and that, though they may not lack the continuity of the apostolic tradition, this sign will strengthen and deepen that continuity. They may need to recover the sign of the episcopal succession.*”¹⁶

In this regard we can say, that BEM tries to bring the churches together in all questions linked with the separation at the Eucharistic table except the question, in how far differences concerning the Christology and Pneumatology are acceptable or not. This remains an open issue, which is today expressed in the ecumenical movement with the general question: What are the limits of our differences or in other words how much difference is possible within the unity we seek?

4. Further perspectives

The BEM-document was sent to all the member churches of the WCC, including the Roman Catholic Church which is not a member but is officially and fully involved in the Commission on Faith and Order. They were asked to give official responses in how far the text really points out convergences. The result – in brief words – was, that most of the churches felt that this text was quite helpful and a good step forward, but

¹⁵ Episcopal succession means the succession of one bishop from another bishop through the laying on of hands during the act of episcopal ordination.

¹⁶ BEM on Ministry par.53

at the same time practically all of them pointed to some of the old controversies and felt that their position has not been taken seriously enough.¹⁷

For example concerning the question of the presence of Christ the Roman Catholic church points out very clearly in its answer, that the transformation of the Eucharistic elements cannot be negotiated, because it is a matter of faith. Thus they regret, that what the term ‘transsubstantiation’ means is taken up in BEM in an ambiguous way.¹⁸ On the other hand some of the Protestant churches have contrary difficulties and think, that the text does not give sufficient emphasis to a “position that excludes certain modes of presence in the eucharist”¹⁹, namely the change of the substance of bread and wine into body and blood of Christ.

In a similar way we see in the question of the Eucharist as a sacrifice, that the different churches in their responses point again to some of their specific features, like some Protestant churches which feel, that the text is not clear enough about the fact, that the church cannot ‘offer’ something to God, because it is God himself who offers himself in Jesus Christ.²⁰ On the other hand some Orthodox churches in their responses point out, that the text does not enough express the actualization of Christ’s sacrifice in the Eucharist.²¹

What is interesting for us, is the discussion about the ministry, which is closely linked with the Eucharist. The result of the official responses to this part of the BEM-text is similar to the responses given to the Eucharist part.²² But it is important to note, that the proposal of BEM regarding the mutual recognition of ministry, which I quoted above²³ was taken up and put into practice in a few cases: For example the Lutheran

¹⁷ Cf. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982-1990. Report on the Process and Responses, Faith & Order Paper No. 149, WCC Publications Geneva 1990

¹⁸ Churches respond to BEM. Official responses to the ‘Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry’ text, ed. By Max Thurian, Vol. VI, Faith & Order Paper No. 144, WCC Publications Geneva 1988, p. 22

¹⁹ Response of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, in: Churches respond to BEM, Vol. II, Faith & Order Paper No. 132, WCC Publications Geneva 1986, p. 169

²⁰ Cf. Response of the Waldensian Church of the River Plate, in: Churches respond to BEM, Vol. IV, Faith & Order Paper 137, WCC Publications Geneva 1987, p.120

²¹ Cf. Response of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, in: Churches respond to BEM, Vol. III, Faith & Order Paper No. 135, WCC Publications Geneva, p. 18

²² Cf. The summary in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982-1990. Report on the Process and Responses, Faith & Order Paper No. 149, WCC Publications Geneva 1990

²³ Cf. Footnote 14

churches in Scandinavia and the Baltic countries were able to declare communion with the Church of England and Wales (Anglican) by introducing the proposal made by BEM. This means that the Anglicans (who have preserved the Episcopal succession) recognize the apostolicity of the Lutherans while the latter introduced now the episcopal succession by having the assistance of an Anglican bishop at all their bishop ordinations.²⁴ A similar agreement was reached between the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada in 2001.²⁵

In summary we need to say: The ecumenical movement and BEM so far has not been able to heal the major separating lines between the classic church families like Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox churches. But BEM made full communion possible between churches of the same church family and even between some churches between which the question of the Episcopal succession had been a separating factor before, and that is: between churches of different type.

The question is now, of course, how we can overcome the remaining difficulties in the future. In my understanding, the BEM-document made a first step: It explained very clearly the convergences and also the main points of differences between the churches. It made also some concrete proposals for change without losing the own identity in order to bring the churches closer together. This is all a body like the Faith & Order commission or the WCC can do. The next step is a task for the churches, namely to study the issues and answer the questions, which are the main questions in the present situation: Is it possible to recognize each other as churches **DESPITE** these differences? Or in other words: How much difference is possible while we still can sit at the same Eucharistic table? Is it not much more important, to see, what we have in common, than in what we differ?

I close my presentation with these questions, because it is not only the task of the church hierarchies to answer them, but it is the task of each faithful.

²⁴ Cf. The so called Porvoo Agreement, published in: Together in Mission and Ministry. The Porvoo Common Statement with Essays on Church and Ministry in Northern Europe, Church House Publishing London 1993, p. 1-42

²⁵ The so called Waterloo Declaration „Called to Full Communion“, published on www.elcic.ca/What-We-Believe/Waterloo-Declaration.cfm.

